

A MILLION LAUGHS

Coming out of one of the comedy clubs downtown I feel sadder than I ever have in my entire life. It isn't that the comedians were so terrible. Some of their jokes were hysterical. Sidesplittingly so. But the realization that I actually paid a \$10.00 cover charge just to be cheered up by people I've never heard of, the knowledge that nothing in my everyday existence is capable of performing this same function, that's not the kind of feeling that makes me grin from ear to ear. I walk through the fog of the wharf district and think to myself how nice it would be to find an after-hours tragedy club right about now.

FOR STALIN AND SHIRLEY TEMPLE

The wax museum, last attraction before the beach, the only place Stalin and Shirley Temple stand beside each other, on velvet pedestals. His mustache, her lollipop, his uniform, her pinafore, all the same in the chilled gray light that throws a scary sparkle on her ringlets, on his medals, on the tourists with tickets, and the guards who worry about fire more than thieves, about flames making puddles of these symbols of a century, nobody knowing who will come to take their place.

A FIFTIES FLOWER

Who knows if buttercups grow anymore? Well, the prejudiced botanists, of course. But you and I would be hard-pressed to point out a buttercup patch if called to the task. Even if we could, they're not as yellow as they used to be. And we certainly can't identify them on sight the way we could in the old days, when we held them under each other's chins to see if a light flashed. All I really remember is how small and delicate they were. They were a fifties flower, determined to stay in the background, like Mamie Eisenhower on state occasions. In the sixties they started to disappear with the crass ascendancy of daisies. By the seventies you had a phlox pox. And everyone you knew seemed a little shakier.